

RUTH: REDEEMING THE MESS

ruth 3.1-18: risk and rest

Questions for Personal Study

Read the entirety of Ruth 1-3. What makes it such a great story?
What seems wise in Naomi's advice? What seems risky? Foolish?
Why do you think Ruth agrees to go along with Naomi's advice?
Knowing what you do about Boaz, does his response surprise you?
Would you have passed this test without falling into sexual sin?

Questions for Study in Community

What does this passage tell us about how Christians should date or court?
Is there a right way to do this? Is this example God's best? What is?
How much should we pursue and how much should we wait in relationship?
How do you as a group support your single people in this stuff?

Questions for Staying on Mission

Part of our mission is the kind of community you are in key areas like this.
For purity to be possible in relationship, what do you need to do or be?
What of Boaz & Ruth needs to be imitated more in our day?
How could you help bring redemption into broken relationships around you?

Thoughts for Parents

This is a touchy passage for young kids, so tread carefully, but don't assume that they can't understand the difference between wisdom and foolishness. Spend time discussing what you hope for your kids when it comes to dating, courting, and that potential minefield. Help them see God's best!

Discuss why Naomi's advice is risky and dangerous for Ruth.
Show them how Ruth makes her intentions clear to Boaz in v.9.
Talk about how Boaz responds with prayer and humility to her.
Ruth is a worthy woman. Talk about the connection to Proverbs 31.
Show how Boaz is a man who is up to the task of overcoming obstacles.
Show your boys how to be a Boaz-like dude in relationship to girls.
Show your girls how to prepare for marriage not serial dating!
And parents, have a plan NOW for how that season of life will go!!!

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Hopeful Beginnings

Through the kindness of Boaz to Ruth, this story of tragedy and loss is beginning to turn around. Though Naomi returned to Israel without her husband or her sons, she brought with her the young convert Ruth who has - by the grace of God - become a woman of noble character. Ruth has spent the entire harvest season, about 8 weeks, working in the fields of the righteous and worthy man, Boaz. In their first interactions we witnessed what seemed to be the hopeful beginnings of a divinely orchestrated love story: the poor, widowed Moabite girl was tenderly served and strongly protected by the rich, single, God-fearing Israelite stud. Boaz started really well, but has failed to close the deal, and so Ruth continues to live with her mother-in-law even as the harvest season comes to a close.

For whatever reason, Boaz has stopped pursuing Ruth, their relationship remains undefined, and the end of harvest signals the end of their regular contact with each other. What should Naomi and Ruth do?

A Brief History of Dating

In the given situation, Ruth really has two options. The first option is the Israelite way in which her parents - particularly dad - took the role of mediator between his daughter and any possible suitors. This is the option of courtship, and was the universal cultural norm until the beginning of the 20th century! In this arrangement, the parents were involved in any relationship their daughter might have, and the young men would come to the home of a young gal to get to know her *and* her family. Courtship ensured the safety of the young woman and helped to ensure that the young man's motives were pure.

The second option is the Moabite way, or what is now commonly known as dating. Before the 1900s, a "date" was slang for securing the services of a prostitute. Then, beginning in the early 1900s with the rise of the entertainment industry and as the more young people moved into cities to work in factories, young men no longer had to come "calling" on a young lady. Rather, the young men now took their date out on the town, and the entire event centered around

the man's wallet and his willingness to open it for his date. This change resulted in two subtle but profound shifts in male-female relationships. First, while in courtship the woman and her family set the boundaries by choosing who could and could not come calling, in dating it was now the men who set the boundaries by asking for a date and taking her out. Second, while courtship was largely void of money and gifts, dating is primarily a financial transaction as the man was expected to pay for a nice time out on the town. It wasn't long before young men realized that it was easy to expect some sort of return for their money, and sexual favors in the back-seat of the car became a regular part of the dating scene.

Fast forward through the sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's, the advent of the birth control pill which divorced sexual activity from the natural result of children, and you have our 21st century dating scene. In summary, what we think is normal in the dating scene is not, and what we commonly know as dating is much more closely related to prostitution as men spend their money on a gal in exchange for sexual favors. In fact, even dating is on the decline as more people are content to hook-up at bars or parties, provide sexual favors to one another, sleep together, live together, or simply be friends-with-benefits.

Risky Advice

Unfortunately for Ruth, she doesn't have a daddy who loves God and wants to protect her. Rather, she has a scheming mother-in-law who isn't sure if God is trustworthy. Naomi gives Ruth advice on how to navigate this relationship, and the verdict is still out on whether her advice is risky wisdom or utter foolishness.

Naomi's plan is for Ruth to first get dolled-up: because Boaz has only seen Ruth stinky and working in the field, Ruth is to shower, shave, do her hair, put on make-up, splash-on a little perfume, and put on a sexy dress. After she is clean and smells delicious, Ruth is to go down to the threshing floor where Boaz will be eating and drinking in joy for the abundance God has provided. Naomi instructs Ruth to wait until he falls asleep, sneak up next to him in the dark, pull back his cloak from his feet, wait for him to wake up, and see what happens! This is very risky advice for Ruth since prostitutes were known to frequent the threshing floor, Boaz has had a few drinks, and it will be so dark know one will ever know what happens. Not only is Naomi putting Ruth and Boaz to a serious moral test, she's also presuming on the providence of God.

A Providential Match

Fortunately for Boaz, Ruth seems to have the purest of intentions, as her request to him makes clear: "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." Ruth is inviting Boaz to answer his own prayer (2.12) by asking for her hand in marriage. Fortunately for Ruth, Boaz is a worthy man of character, and rather than take advantage of her in the dark, he prays for her, humbly thanking her for her kindness (hesed!) toward him. It seems the real reason Boaz has not pursued Ruth is that he thinks she is out of his league: "You have not gone after the young men [though] all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman." He is older and perhaps less attractive than many of the other young men who would have been glad to be with Ruth. But, by using the word "worthy," the same word the narrator used to describe Boaz in 2.1, Boaz is declaring that he sees Ruth as an equal companion and that he would be a fool to not marry her. It is the same word translated in Prov 31 as "excellent."

However, like every good love story, there is an obstacle to overcome: "Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I." Though there is another man who has the right of redemption before Boaz, Boaz pledges to Ruth that he will take care of it and encourages to her to rest until morning and trust him to do it. In the morning he sends her home with another load of Barley, a sign to Naomi that though her advice was (at best) risky, Boaz has gotten the message and he will graciously take care of it all. In this we see that a man must rise to the occasion and overcome whatever obstacles are put before him in order to marry a girl like Ruth and live happily ever after.

While we don't encourage following Naomi's advice in dating, we do see in this that there is a time to take risk and trust that God is good and faithful and that in his providence he will work all things together for good. Ruth and Naomi take a calculated risk and entrust themselves to the God who has orchestrated all this, simultaneously trusting the deep, godly character of Boaz.

And once again we catch a glimpse of our glorious Boaz, Jesus Christ, in the faithfulness of Ruth's redeemer. Ruth has responded to Boaz by risking everything to come to the man who has offered her such kindness, and her risk pays off as he rises to accomplish her redemption. Just as Naomi says to Ruth, "Wait," so God says to us, "Wait, for my Man, Jesus Christ, will settle it today." Jesus is our redeemer, who gives us everything in order to secure our salvation, rising from dead to settle our account once and for all.